

o **Kmart? No tears on North Ave - Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (WI) - May 3, 2002 - page 01**

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Debbie Akinbiyi hadn't heard until Thursday that plans had fallen through for the \$17 million **Super Kmart** at W. Fond du Lac and W. North avenues.

She's been too busy opening a business in the same central city neighborhood to notice.

Akinbiyi, owner of Enchantment boutique, seems unfazed by this week's news of the **Super Kmart's** demise. She figures it won't have any effect on her boutique, which opens next week at 3829 W. North Ave.

"There's so much money in the inner city, in terms of shopping dollars," Akinbiyi says. "I just believe in that street. I wanted to be part of the revitalization."

Akinbiyi's 5,000-square-foot boutique, which provides formal wear and other services, is among a string of new commercial developments along North Ave., particularly between 35th and 39th streets. High hopes for the proposed 156,000-square-foot **Super Kmart**, a combined supermarket/discount store with up to 450 employees, have faded because of the retailer's bankruptcy.

But North Ave. is still inching along.

"I wouldn't characterize it as a landlord's market," says Richard Lincoln, senior vice president at Irgens Development Partners LLC, which operates the North Avenue Commerce Center, between 25th and 27th streets. "But there definitely has been activity and interest."

The North Avenue Commerce Center, a business park that includes light industrial, office and retail uses, recently leased 11,625 square feet to Aventis Bio-Services Inc., a blood plasma processor. Aventis is moving this summer from a smaller location at 2111 W. North Ave.

Also, AutoZone Inc. plans to build a 6,200-square-foot auto parts supply store by September at 2459-2485 W. North Ave., says company spokesman Ray Pohlman. The Memphis-based retailer has 10 stores in the Milwaukee area, but this will be its first central city location.

Most of the new businesses are developing further west, near the 57,000-square-foot Jewel-Osco supermarket that opened last year on 2355 N. 35th St., just north of North Ave.

Endeavour Co. will soon begin remodeling a 11,800-square-foot building at 3600 W. North Ave. that has landed a beauty supply store as its ground-floor tenant. A 1,500-square-foot Citgo convenience store and gas station is under development at 3708 W. North Ave. And other developers, some with the help of city grants, are buying and remodeling long-vacant buildings and lots on the street.

Much of the activity is tied to increased interest from retailers that are attracted by new housing in

the area, including apartments developed by the non-profit New Covenant Housing Corp.

Akinbiyi's boutique, which will offer hair styling, nail services and clothes tied to weddings and other special occasions, has bounced around on different locations along North Ave. in recent years.

She says moving to the newly remodeled building will put her in a location with adequate, upgraded space. That gives her the ability to expand beyond clothing sales and hire around 15 employees, including hair stylists and nail manicurists.

Akinbiyi's building, and several others along the street, are owned by the non-profit North Avenue Community Development Corp. Damon Dorsey, the group's president, says the area needs continued housing development, which will help attract more retailers.

Dorsey says the former Sears building, at 2100 W. North Ave., just across the street from the former **Super Kmart** site, could be remodeled into apartments on the upper floors.

"My vision is to see much more mixed-use development, much more pedestrian traffic and a much more urban feel," Dorsey says.

Dorsey says both local retailers, as well as discount chains such as clothing merchants T.J. Maxx and Marshalls, are viable candidates for the 15-acre **Super Kmart** site, which is largely vacant.

"I hope we don't go back to the big box mentality," says Dorsey, who had concerns about whether the **Super Kmart** would be too large for an urban neighborhood.

Dorsey and others are participating in a planning process for the neighborhood that was recently started by the Department of City Development. The process should be completed by this fall, and it will likely include redevelopment scenarios for the corner of Fond du Lac and North avenues.

Condos approved: The Waterfront, a 64-unit, \$20 million condominium development planned for a site overlooking the Milwaukee River in the 200 block of S. Water St., was approved this week by the city Plan Commission. In response to concerns raised by nearby business operators, the commission required developer Peter Renner to add more surface parking spots, says Department of City Development spokesman John Bratina.

Mall redevelopment planned: Westgate Mall in Racine will be redeveloped by a joint venture between Investment Real Estate Services Inc., of Des Plaines, Ill., and Westgate Holdings LLC. The 139,400-square-foot building could be redeveloped as a mixed-use property, with either office space or senior housing, says Michael Christie, Investment Real Estate president.

Lease signed: G&G Power Sports is leasing 9,806 square feet in the 19,174-square-foot Lakewood Service Center, under development at the southeast corner of Lakewood Drive and Racine Ave., Muskego. The building is owned by Lakewood Commercial Development LLC, and Jeff Hoffman of Judson & Associates brokered the deal.

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